



# open for business

DANNI WARD visits a quirky new bar taking part in the regeneration of Tooting

**M**oving to Tooting, it was the cheap Indian restaurants and exotic grocers on every corner that won my heart. But when it came to finding somewhere to take the girls on a night out, I feared the unsavoury branch of a certain nationwide pub chain (sticky under foot and frequented by the far from sober) was my only option. Then at the end of October 2012 Graveney and Meadow swung open its doors.

Before you go inside, you should know this is not your average London bar. Oh no, this is a bar/café/bakery/tapas restaurant/buttery/cocktail bar.

Stepping through the door your eyes will first land on the rainbow of cakes, meringues, macaroons and all sorts of goodies on the counter; screaming to be devoured. Once you're able to tear your eyes away from the desserts, you'll begin to notice the mismatched vintage furniture, the peeling 1970s wallpaper and Grandma's brown crockery proudly pinned to the walls. It is certainly quirky – at least for Tooting.

Graveney and Meadow's general manager, Richard Salthouse, suggests that the inspiration for their décor may lie in their self-identification as a "buttery". He explains that, "in the past [a buttery was] a


place in universities where students could collect provisions such as baked bread, but it is also an old term for somewhere alcohol is stored. If there were any 'inspiration' for vintage decor it could be the time when 'buttery' was still in common parlance for both of these things – perhaps we'll be able to re-establish the word."

It may well do with the roaring trade they have seen in their first four months. "It's been an incredibly warm reception," says Salthouse. "We've had such nice things said to us over the bar, and it's been great to have that feedback."

They're not alone in their success. Graveney and Meadow's Antic London sisters in Tooting, bar/nightclub The Tram and Social and pub/wine bars The Antelope and The Wheatshaf, are busier than ever, according to Salthouse. What's more, vintage-styled eatery Tota (according to legend this was the name of a Saxon Chieftain of the area) and upscale pub Gorringer Park have both opened their doors to the people of Tooting in the last few months. Salthouse believes this suggests there is still an unsatiated appetite for eateries among Tooting residents.

All these successful upscale eating and drinking establishments make Tooting seem

like it's positively bustling with middle-class young professionals chortling over last night's episode of *Masterchef* (yes, I just described myself), but Tooting has been, and still is, a little rough around the edges. It's "looting Tooting"; home to Robert Lindsay's "revolutionary" and petty criminal Wolfie Smith (for anyone under the age of 40, this is a reference to the 1970s British sitcom *Citizen Smith*); and where there are streets you just don't go down. While my rent and the developers putting up swish apartments all over the joint may disagree, Salthouse says: "We might attract a few more people to Mitcham Road, and add a pound or two to a few house prices, but regeneration of an area is down to more than nice bars."

It may take a few more years before Tooting sheds its hardened exterior, but with trendy quality restaurants like Graveney and Meadow making its presence known, Tooting is declaring itself a destination for more than just Indian food. 

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